

SCIENCE & EDUCATION Impact

Benefits from USDA/Land-Grant Partnership

Coping with Crisis and Disaster

Sept. 11 attacks spur Land-Grant/USDA response nationwide.

When disaster strikes, Land-Grant Universities are called upon for immediate assistance. Because of their expertise in many diverse disciplines, Land-Grants can quickly marshal teams of experts with the needed skills. The fires, floods and other natural disasters for which we typically prepare were trumped by the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States. These tragic and unprecedented events called for diverse information services and expertise to help Americans cope in the aftermath of this crisis. The Land-Grant/USDA partnership responded in a variety of ways, at the disaster sites and in communities nationwide.

Payoff

- **Airing concerns.** After the Sept. 11 World Trade Center collapse, public officials and the news media speculated on the disaster's effect on air quality and the health risks facing rescue workers and others living and working in the vicinity. **California's** DELTA group analyzed air quality in lower Manhattan. Finding high levels of tiny particles that can penetrate the lungs, the scientists recommended specific methods for cleaning apartments, offices and schools near the collapse site. Many different metals were found in the air samples, including high concentrations of iron, titanium, vanadium, nickel, copper and zinc. No safety guidelines exist for these substances. Knowing the composition of the dust and smoke emanating from the wrecked jets and World Trade Center may help doctors in evaluate rescue workers' and residents' health problems.
- **Busting crop duster fears.** As a precaution against further terrorist air attacks, the Federal Aviation Association grounded all crop dusting aircraft for a few weeks following the September attacks. In Georgia, farmers were about to begin the cotton defoliation season, much of which is done with crop dusters. Once the flight ban was lifted, **Georgia** Extension checked out all calls from concerned citizens who wanted to confirm legitimate uses of crop dusters and familiarize themselves with local crop dusters. The response calmed fears and kept rumors to a minimum. To help New Mexico residents concerned about potential terrorist assaults on agriculture, **New Mexico** Extension organized a town hall meeting via the Internet. The meeting

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brought together state and federal experts representing six agencies – the New Mexico Department of Health, USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, New Mexico Livestock Board, New Mexico Environment Department, New Mexico Department of Public Safety and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration – to discuss emergency preparedness. **Ohio State** Extension also provided tips on how to keep farm machinery and pesticides secure from people who might use them for terrorist activities.

- **Talking about terrorism with kids.** Many kids watched the Sept. 11 events unfold live on television. Their parents and teachers felt unprepared to talk to children about the disaster. Within hours of the attacks, **Ohio State** Extension and **Purdue** Extension launched Web sites to provide parents, educators and others with resources to help children deal with terrorism. During the first three days, 30,000 people – many from as far away as Hong Kong, Australia and Bali – accessed Purdue's Children and Terrorism site. In Indiana, 64 percent of county-based extension educators who used it printed the material to hand out, and 58 percent distributed information to media.
- **Spreading hope and love.** Louisiana youth wanted to show support for the Sept. 11 victims' families. The St. Martin Parish Junior Leader 4-H club planned and implemented a Messages of Hope and Love project, collecting signatures on large cards in support of the victims of Sept. 11. **Louisiana** 4-H agents encouraged 4-H members to volunteer for community service. Three large cards were filled with messages and sent to the attack sites at the Pentagon, New York City and Pennsylvania. More than \$400 was collected and donated to the American Red Cross, and 150 youth pledged 721 hours of community service. **Georgia** 4-H held discussions with 850 young people. More than 80 percent of the youth reported feeling angry and helpless. A county extension agent got them involved with Sept. 11-related projects. More than 180 4-Hers wrote 1,458 letters to Americans serving in the military, and 21 made angels for the victims' families. One youth said, "I was scared and mad about the attacks on America, but I didn't think there was anything I could do about it. The 4-H project to write letters made me know that everybody can do something good in a bad situation."

- **Flood of information.** When Tropical Storm Allison struck in June 2001, **Louisiana** Extension coordinated with the FEMA disaster mitigation team and supplied 50,000 copies of locally produced flood protection fact sheets for distribution through local stores and disaster recovery centers. Extension answered inquiries on flood protection methods and assistance programs. During the week of the storm, extension's Web site at <http://www.LouisianaFloods.org> received more than 90,000 hits from 12,000 visitors.
- **Uncowed by heat.** During a 1999 severe heat wave, cattle deaths and weight losses cost Nebraska producers more than \$20 million. Moderate heat waves in 1992, 1995 and 1997 each cost between \$5 million and \$10 million. **Nebraska** animal scientists collaborated with colleagues at **Missouri**, **Purdue** and USDA's Meat Animal Research Center to develop techniques for cattle feeders to reduce heat-related losses. Nebraska feedlots that have implemented the research-based strategies reported that heat-related losses in 2001 were less than 10 percent of previous years. Adopting these strategies should cut heat-related cattle deaths by 50 percent or more and limit weight losses.



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